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U.S./USSR/
DISINFORMATION

HARTMAN: We all grew up, here in the United States, anyway, hearing stories about the intrigues of the Soviet spy system, about the Kremlin propaganda machine. There is another way the Soviet government tries to influence what happens around the world. It's something called disinformation. It's a well-organized, worldwide system of planted news stories, half-truths, lies, even forged documents at times. Some experts believe the Kremlin is escalating its war of disinformation. Richard Shultz is with the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University. He's co-author of a major new book on disinformation. Richard Burt is our assistant secretary of state for European and Canadian affairs. Arkady Shevchenko is a Soviet defector. He now lives in the United States and he had a lot of firsthand experience with disinformation when he was a very high-ranking member of the Soviet mission at the U.N. Mr. Shevchenko, welcome back, and Mr. Burt, welcome. Dr. Shultz, good morning. Dr. Shultz, as I just mentioned, we've said that there are lies, half-truths, planted stories and so forth under this umbrella of disinformation. Specifically, give us an example of something, would you? RICHARD SHULTZ: Well, an example could be an agent of influence. Disinformation is a whole range of political and propaganda techniques, what we call influence techniques, that are used to try to affect politics in another country. Especially they're used against major adversaries. So the objective would be to try to undermine the political leadership of a major adversary like the United States, to undermine the institutions, to influence the policies, to split the United States from its allies. And so for 20 years, for example, the Soviets ran a major campaign and it's still going today to attempt to split the United States from its NATO allies.

HARTMAN: How big an operation is this in the Soviet Union? SHULTZ: It's a big operation. They have a number of key bureaucratic elements that are involved, including the KGB and the international department, but the important thing is that it extends well beyond the Soviet Union, where you find in the West many agents and intelligence officers and even diplomats.

HARTMAN: What about here? What about here in the United States? How much is going on here, for instance? SHULTZ: Quite a bit. We estimate that a large part of the Soviet official presence, its intelligence, is involved in disinformation, possibly with the bloc, the East European

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intelligence services, close to 500 officials who conduct disinformation or active measures.

HARTMAN: What's the message behind all this? SHULTZ: Well, there are many. I mean, there's a long-term message and that is that the United States is the major threat to peace in the world.

HARTMAN: That's what they're trying to get out. SHULTZ: Absolutely, and even in a period of detente, you know, in the early '70s when we were in detente, the message never changed. So if you look at propaganda or secret techniques, the message was still there and amplified. The only change I see over 20 years is a much more sophisticated and a much larger effort on the part of the Soviets.

HARTMAN: Mr. Burt, how serious a problem is this or how serious is it considered to be at the State Department and how do we react to it? RICHARD BURT: Well, David, it was a problem that I think for many years was virtually ignored in the State Department. It's really been in the last 3, four years under the Reagan administration that we've begun to take the problem seriously. We started to actually document specific cases of Soviet disinformation. For example, the shooting down of the KAL airliner. We've documented cases where, as Dr. Shultz pointed out, they have tried to drive a wedge within the alliance. We have sent briefing teams around the world to talk to governments and the foreign press to again document these occurrences. The problem is most serious in the Third World, where there is not a sophisticated press corp, where there is not sophisticated governments and where rumors can be easily spread and very difficult to disprove.

HARTMAN: Mr. Shevchenko, you have firsthand experience with this. In your experience, for instance, at the United Nations, give us an example, would you, of something the Soviet Union might do as these gentlemen are talking about? ARKADY SHEVCHENKO: Oh, a lot of things have been done in the United Nations because there is a high level of representation of the Third World countries who come to the general assembly and to the session of the security council. They could be easily fed with the false information and they are easy victims for the Soviet Union. Coming back to one of the most successful, I would say, disinformation conveyed by the Soviet Union, I would like to mention the, you remember very well what kind of an image the Soviet projected about late Soviet leader Yuri Andropov. You remember the man who is a closet liberal, who is progressive, who is a reformist and so on, and you see how easily it was bought in the United States, and it's still even now, even now a lot of the

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spoilers, a lot of the Soviet specialists in this country believe all that and all that was been planted by the KGB, by the orders disinformation conveyed in the United States.

HARTMAN: What should the United States do, Mr. Shevchenko, to counter this disinformation from the Soviet Union? How do we protect ourselves and the free world, the Third World, from this disinformation? SHEVCHENKO: First of all, of course, it should be a major effort to analyze everything that the Soviets are doing and the best way, of course, to put them in the corner and discover something that they reveal a false information is there, and you know, what is also important, I think, that the State Department or relevant government agency of the United States, they have to work with the press here, I think, with the mass media and to make each case which has been discovered either when it's a forgery or it's really a deception campaign, is to cover that extensively through the mass media, and then the people will better understand that. Unfortunately, of course, it's like Dr. Shultz mentioned. It's almost a forgotten area, you know. For a long time in this country and in the West they didn't take it seriously, you know. It kind of say, oh what, 'So what it could be some kind of a forgery,' but it's really a serious thing.

HARTMAN: Mr. Burt, are we on track? Just briefly, are we on track more now than we were? BURT: I think we are. We have something called the National Endowment for Democracy which allows us to aid democratic forces throughout the world, and I think this is a positive approach. If we work towards a democracy and a free press and free institutions, disinformation can't survive.

HARTMAN: Mr. Burt, thank you. Dr. Shultz, good to have you with us, and Mr. Shevchenko, thank you. Good to have you back. Thank you, gentlemen.